

Children's Safety Tips

Precautions in the Neighborhood. Children Should:

- * Be alert, cautious, and prepared.
- * Know the safest route to school, stores, and friends' houses, avoid isolated areas, and be able to identify safe places to go in an emergency.
- * Report any crimes, suspicious activities, or anything that does not seem quite right to the RSO, local police, school authorities, and parents or guardians.
- * Try to walk and play with a friend or in a group rather than alone and always let a parent or guardian know where you are going to be.
- * Stay away from known trouble spots, poorly lit or isolated areas, and strangers who hang around playgrounds, public rest rooms, and schools.
- * Avoid being around others who tend to engage in forms of violence or use alcohol or other drugs.
- * Know to settle arguments with words rather than fists or weapons, and to walk away when others are arguing.

Child Abduction. Precautionary steps for parents and guardians:

- * Maintain a complete identification packet on each child, including recent photographs, description, birthmarks, fingerprints, handwriting samples, voice and video recordings, and passport information.
- * Teach each child a code word to indicate that the child is safe and being treated well in the event of kidnapping.
- * Have on hand a complete checklist of what to do and who to contact during the initial stages of an abduction (for example, contact the RSO, or local police)

Steps parents should take if they receive a call that their child has been abducted:

- * Remain calm, and maintain a cooperative but professional attitude.
- * Request details of demands by caller, and identify to whom the demands are directed.
- * Make a note of the caller's voice, background noise, and any other identifiable information.
- * Tape-record the conversation if possible.
- * State that it will take time to meet the demands and to make appropriate private arrangements.
- * Ask to speak with your child to know that he or she is alive. If this cannot be done, then ask a question that only your child would know the answer.
- * Try to end the call on a positive note, no matter what the actual substance of the conversation. Assure the caller that his or her demands will be met.
- * Dedicate the telephone number on which the call is received to receive any subsequent calls.
- * Don't let children lean or hang on microwave oven doors. If the door becomes misaligned, the oven could leak radiation.

School Buses and Children. More children are injured outside of buses than as passengers. Teach your children to:

- * Never stand in the street while waiting for the bus.
- * Stay at least an arm's length away from the bus.
- * Never bend down to pick up something that has fallen beneath the bus.
- * Never let small children play with matches and always keep matches in a location unreachable to any small children in your home.



United States Department of State
Bureau of Diplomatic Security

Personal Security

- At Home
- On the Street
- While Traveling

Contents

- 2 Introduction
- 3 Residential Security
- 5 Establishing a Safehaven
- 6 Home Security While You Are Away
- 9 Personal Security While Traveling
- 11 Personal Security in Hotels
- 13 Fire Safety at Home
- 15 Security Do's for Children
- 16 Letter and Parcel Bombs
- 18 Carjacking
- 21 Surveillance
- 24 Sexual Assault Prevention

Introduction

For Americans living overseas, the most serious obstacle to personal safety is an attitude of complacency or fatalism. “It can’t happen to me” and “if it’s going to happen, it’s going to happen” is dangerous thinking.

Recent political events throughout the world have changed—but not necessarily diminished—the threats you face. Today, the most prevalent threat you face overseas is crime.

A criminal attack against you or your family can take place at any post, as can a fire or other disaster. However, you can influence what happens to you by assuming more responsibility for your own security.

The information presented in this booklet is general. Not all the information applies to all posts. Ask for post-specific information from your Regional Security Officer (RSO) or Post Security Officer (PSO).

Residential Security

Residential security is a critical component of any personal security program. The following guidelines should be used in reviewing your residential security.

- All entrances, including service doors and gates, should have quality locks—preferably deadbolt. Check your:
 - Front Door
 - Rear Door
 - Garage Door(s)
 - Service Door(s)
 - Patio Door
 - Sliding Glass Door
 - Gate
 - Swimming Pool Gate
 - Guest House Door(s)
- Don't leave keys "hidden" outside the home. Leave an extra key with a trusted neighbor or colleague.
- Keep doors locked even when you or family members are at home.
- Have window locks installed on all windows. Use them.
- Lock louvered windows—especially on the ground floor.
- Have locks installed on your fuse boxes and external power sources.
- If you have window grilles and bars, review fire safety. Don't block bedroom

windows with permanent grilles if the windows may be used for emergency egress.

- ❑ If you have burglar or intrusion alarms, check and **use them.**
- ❑ Keep at least one fire extinguisher on each floor, and be sure to keep one in the kitchen. Show family members and household help how to use them.
- ❑ Periodically check smoke detectors and replace batteries when necessary.
- ❑ Keep flashlights in several areas in the house. Check the batteries often, especially if you have children in your home. (They love to play with flashlights!)
- ❑ A family dog can be a deterrent to criminals. But remember, even the best watchdog can be controlled by food or poison. Do not install separate “doggy doors” or entrances. They also can admit small intruders.
- ❑ Choose a location that offers the most security. The less remote, the safer your home will be, particularly in a neighborhood close to police and fire protection.
- ❑ Know your neighbors. Develop a rapport with them and offer to keep an eye on each other’s homes, especially during trips.

- If you observe any unusual activity, report it immediately to your RSO.
- Establish safe family living patterns. If you understand the importance of your contribution to the family's overall security, the entire household will be safer.
- While at home, you and your family should rehearse safety drills and be aware of procedures to escape danger and get help.
- Educate family members and domestic help in the proper way to answer the telephone at home.
- Vary daily routines; avoid predictable patterns.
- Know where all family members are at all times.
- Use these same guidelines while on leave or in travel status.

Establishing a Safehaven

Follow three basic steps in setting up a safehaven in your home:

- Designate an internal room;
- Install a two-way communications system or telephone; and
- Furnish the safehaven with an emergency kit.

It is highly unlikely you would spend more than a few hours in a safehaven; however, the supplies listed below are suggested for your maximum safety. Your security officer can tell you more about how to select and secure your safehaven.

The following is a checklist of possible safehaven supplies.

- Fire extinguisher
- Fresh water
- 5-day supply of food
- Candles, matches, flashlight
- Extra batteries
- Bedding
- Toilet facilities
- Sterno stove, fuel
- Shortwave or other radio
- Medical/first aid kit
- Other items for your comfort and leisure—a change of clothing, books, games

Home Security While You Are Away

- Notify your RSO or PSO of your departure and return dates but don't otherwise publicize your travel or vacation plans. Leave contact numbers with appropriate mission personnel.
- Arrange to have a friend or colleague pick up your newspapers, mail, or other deliveries daily.

- ❑ Secure your home. Close and lock all windows and doors. Don't forget to lock garage or gate doors.
- ❑ Consider purchasing timers to turn on outside and inside lights automatically at various times throughout the night.
- ❑ Check outside lighting and replace older light bulbs. You don't want a light burning out while you are away.
- ❑ Ask a friend or colleague to check your residence periodically, ensuring your furnace or air conditioning is functioning and that timers and lights are working.
- ❑ The decision to set the automated alarm system may vary from region to region. Power outages and brownouts may trip alarm systems. Check with your security officer for advice on setting alarm systems when you are away for long periods of time.
- ❑ Unplug all unnecessary appliances such as televisions, stereos, and personal computers.
- ❑ Mow your lawn just before leaving; make arrangements to have someone mow it again if you will be gone for an extended period of time. Also arrange for watering, if that is likely to be needed.
- ❑ In the winter, make arrangements to have someone shovel walkways if it snows. At

a minimum, have a neighbor walk from the street to your door several times.

- ❑ If possible, ask a neighbor to park a car in your driveway (if you are taking yours).
- ❑ If you use a telephone answering machine, turn off the ringer on the telephone. If you don't have an answering machine, unplug or turn off ringers on all telephones.
- ❑ Lock all jewelry, important papers, currency, and other valuable portables in a safe place such as a safe deposit box or home safe.
- ❑ Ensure all personal and home insurance policies are up-to-date and that your coverage is adequate.

Personal Security While Traveling

- Notify your RSO or PSO of your departure and return dates, but don't otherwise publicize your travel or vacation plans. Leave contact numbers with appropriate mission personnel.
- Check plane, train, and bus times before you travel.
- Sit near other people or near aisles or doors. Learn the location of emergency alarms and exits.
- Stay awake and alert when using public transportation.
- Consider purchasing special clothing or accessories to hide your passport, money, or credit cards. Keep the majority of your funds in travelers checks and hidden; carry some in your wallet or handbag. Use a money clip. If you are robbed, you may lose the money in the clip but will retain important credit cards and documents.
- Keep valuables out of sight and luggage close at hand. If carrying a handbag, keep it in front of you, closed, with the fastening toward your body. Keep a wallet in your front pants pocket.
- Let go if your bag is snatched.

- ❑ Do some research on the area you are visiting. Talk to your security officer or consular colleagues regarding travel advisories or warnings.
- ❑ When traveling, dress casually; dress down where appropriate. Be aware of local customs.
- ❑ Don't wear excess jewelry. Reduce wallet and purse contents, particularly cards denoting affiliations, memberships, accounts, etc.
- ❑ At airports, proceed through security checks and go to the boarding area as quickly as possible. These areas are usually the most secure in the airport.
- ❑ In any crowded situation, be aware of any crowding or jostling, even if it appears innocent. This is often a ploy by pickpockets to distract you.
- ❑ Be very careful any time you use a telephone calling card. Fraudulent uses of these cards are on the rise. Look for people observing your card or your fingers as you dial your code. Avoid being heard giving the number to local telephone operators.

Personal Security in Hotels

- Do not discuss your business or travel plans in public areas where they may be overheard. Discuss your travel plans and movements during your stay with as few people as possible.
- Selecting a hotel room on the third to fifth floor generally will keep you out of reach of criminal activity from the street but still within reach of most fire truck ladders.
- Do not entertain strangers in your hotel room.
- Be alert to overly friendly locals who may have criminal intentions. They may offer to take you to a “special” restaurant. Their ruse may be to offer drugged refreshments.
- Never leave valuables in your hotel room exposed or unattended, even in a locked suitcase.
- Place valuables—money, jewelry, airplane tickets, credit cards, passport—in a hotel safe deposit box or room safe.
- Familiarize yourself with escape routes in case of fire or other catastrophe.
- Use the door chain or bolt lock whenever you are in your room.
- Use the door viewer (peephole) before opening the door to visitors.

- ❑ Do not discuss your room number while standing in the lobby or leave your room key on restaurant or bar tables.
- ❑ Keep your room neat so you will notice disturbed or missing items quickly.

Fire Safety at Home

Statistics about fire are frightening. In America, about 30,000 people are injured and nearly 4,800 die from fire each year. This rate is lower than in most other countries. Differences in fire codes, building and electrical standards, and even firefighting capabilities can increase your threat from fire if you live overseas.

Three vital facts you should know about fire:

- It isn't usually fire that kills, it is the products of combustion—smoke, toxic gases, or superheated air.
- Fire travels at lightning speed—up to 19 feet per second.
- The critical hours for a house fire are 11 PM to 6 AM when most people are asleep.

This means you need to detect fire early, and you must move quickly when you do. You and your family can avoid becoming a statistic if you:

- Install smoke detectors in your home.
- Create and practice a fire escape plan.
- Take fire preventive measures such as those listed on the next page.

Smoke Detectors

A smoke detector can mean the difference between life and death. They are inexpensive and are battery operated; they are not at the

mercy of sporadic electrical service. You should have one on every level of your home, particularly in the hallway outside bedrooms. Test your detectors regularly, and replace the batteries as needed—usually twice a year.

Exit Drills

You and your family should create a fire exit plan together. Learn how to escape the house from every room. Locate two exits from each bedroom. Designate a meeting place outside the house. Most importantly—especially if you have children—**PRACTICE YOUR PLAN!**

Preventive Measures

Carelessness with cigarettes is the most frequent cause of house fires. Never smoke in bed!

Open flames and the resulting sparks are dangerous. Don't place barbecue grills or other open flames on the balcony or near the house.

Check for: faulty electrical wiring; overloaded circuits; faulty equipment, including cooking and heating appliances; leaking propane tanks; overloaded or frayed extension cords; dirty chimneys and vents; and flammable liquids.

Keep a fire extinguisher in the house, preferably one on every level but particularly in the kitchen. Teach older children and household help how to use the extinguisher.

Security Do's for Children

- Teach children never to admit strangers into the home.
- Teach children local emergency phone numbers, the mission number, and how to use the two-way radio. Make sure younger children know their name, address, and phone number.
- Caution teenagers about “blind dates” or meeting anyone they do not know.
- Teach younger members of your family not to open mail or packages.
- Teach young children how to answer the telephone so that they do not give out personal information, such as home address, absence of adults, etc.
- Teach children how to say no to strangers.
- Teach children how to exit the house in case of emergency.

Letter and Parcel Bombs

Letter and parcel bombs generally are “victim activated” meaning that a victim or intended target must activate the device by opening it. They do not normally contain timing devices.

Bombs can range from the size of a cigarette package to a large parcel. Letter and package bombs have been disguised as letters, books, candy, and figurines. Delivery methods have included mail systems, personal delivery, or placement at the recipient’s site.

A letter or parcel bomb might have some of the following indicators:

- Suspicious origin—especially if the postmark or name of sender is unusual, unknown, or no further address is given.
- Excessive or inadequate postage.
- Off-balance or lopsided letter or package.
- Unusual weight for the size of the letter or package. Letters also may be unusually thick.
- Stiffness or springiness of contents. (When checking, do not bend excessively.)
- Protruding wires or components; unusual grease or oil stains on the envelope.
- Strange smell, particularly almond or other suspicious odors.

- ❑ Handwriting of sender is not familiar or indicates a foreign style not normally received by recipient.
- ❑ Common words or names are misspelled.
- ❑ Rub on or block lettering.
- ❑ Restrictive markings such as “confidential” or “personal” or an honorific title appended to the name of the addressee.
- ❑ Small hole in the envelope or package wrapping that could be a provision for an arming/safety wire.
- ❑ Rattling inside the envelope or package—possibly loose components of a device.
- ❑ Visual distractions (i.e., currency, pornography).

If you identify a letter or package as suspicious, don't let anyone near it. Notify your RSO or PSO immediately, and leave the letter or package in an open area, such as a courtyard, where it is easily accessible to bomb squad personnel. Never submerge it in water.

Carjacking

- ❑ When in your car, always keep the doors locked. Any time you drive through areas containing stoplights, stop signs, or anything that significantly reduces vehicular speed, keep your windows up.
- ❑ Leave ample maneuvering space between your vehicle and the one in front of you. If you are approached by suspicious persons while you are stopped, do not roll down windows; drive away quickly.
- ❑ If you are being followed or harassed by another driver, try to find the nearest police station, hotel, or other public facility. Once you find a place of safety, don't worry about using a legal parking space. Park as close as you can, and get inside fast.
- ❑ If another driver tries to force you to pull over or to cut you off, keep driving and try to get away. Try to note the license plate number of the car and a description of the car and driver. If this effort places you in danger, don't do it. The information is not as important as your safety.
- ❑ If you are being followed, never lead the person back to your home or stop and get out. Drive to the nearest police station, public facility, or U.S. mission. (You could verify surveillance by going completely around an arbitrarily chosen block.) Always report these incidents to the RSO or PSO.

- ❑ If you are traveling alone and a car “bumps” into you, don’t stop to exchange accident information. Go to the nearest service station or other public place to call the police. (Check with your RSO or PSO to see if this advice is appropriate for your post.)
- ❑ Never, ever pick up hitchhikers!
- ❑ When you park, look for a spot that offers good lighting and is close to a location where there are a lot of people. Lock valuables in the trunk, and lock all doors.
- ❑ Extra precautions are necessary when shopping. If you take packages out to lock them in your trunk, then plan to return to the stores to do more shopping, it may be a good idea to move your car to another section of the parking lot or street. The criminal knows that you will be coming back and can wait to ambush you. By moving your car, you give the impression you’re leaving. If you think you are being followed, do not go back to your car. Return to the safety of the occupied shopping area or office building and contact the authorities.
- ❑ If you have car trouble on the road, raise your hood. If you have a radio antenna, place a handkerchief or other flag there.

When people stop to help, don't get out of the car unless you know them or it's the police. Ask the "good samaritan" to stop at the nearest service station and report your problem.

- ❑ If you are in a parking lot or parked on the street and have trouble, be wary of personal assistance from strangers. Go to the nearest telephone and call a repair service or friend for assistance. If you feel threatened by the presence of nearby strangers, lock yourself in your car and blow the horn to attract attention of others.

By using these basic safety tips and your own common sense, you can help protect yourself.

Surveillance

The purpose of surveillance is to identify a potential target based on the security precautions that individual takes, and the most suitable time, location, and method of attack. Surveillance may last for days or weeks. Naturally, the surveillance of a person who has set routines and who takes few precautions will take less time.

Detecting surveillance requires a fairly constant state of alertness and, therefore, must become a habit. A good sense of what is normal and what is unusual in your surroundings could be more important than any other type of security precaution you may take. Above all, do not hesitate to report any unusual event.

There are three forms of surveillance: foot, vehicular, and stationary. People who have well-established routines permit surveillants to use methods that are much more difficult to detect.

If, for example, you leave the office at the same time each day and travel by the most direct route to your home or if you live in a remote area with few or no alternate routes to your home, surveillants have no need to follow you all the way to your residence.

You should:

- Vary your routes and times of travel.
- Be familiar with your route and have alternate routes.
- Check regularly for surveillance.

Stationary surveillance is most commonly used by terrorist organizations. Most attacks take place near the victim's residence, because that part of the route is least easily varied. People are generally most vulnerable in the morning when departing for work because these times are more predictable than evening arrivals.

Many surveillance teams use vans with windows in the sides or back that permit observation from the interior of the van. Often the van will have the name of a business or utility company to provide some pretext for being in the area.

Where it is not possible to watch the residence unobserved, surveillants must come up with a plausible reason for being in the area. Women and children are often used to give an appearance of innocence. Try to check the street in front of your home from a window before you go out each day.

If you suspect that you are being followed, drive to the nearest police station, fire station, or the U.S. mission. Note the license numbers, color and make of the vehicle, and any information printed on its sides that may be useful in tracing the vehicle or its occupants.

Don't wait to verify surveillance before you report it.

Be alert to people disguised as public utility crews, road workers, vendors, etc., who might station themselves near your home or office.

Whenever possible, leave your car in a secured parking area. Be especially alert in underground parking areas.

Always check your vehicle inside and out before entering it. If you notice anything unusual, do not enter the vehicle.

Household staff and family members should be reminded to look for suspicious activities around your residence; for example, surveillance, attempts to gain access to your residence by fraudulent means, and telephone calls or other inquiries requesting personal information.

Tell your household staff and family members to note descriptions and license numbers of suspicious vehicles. Advise them to be alert for details. Household staff can be one of the most effective defensive mechanisms in your home—use them to your advantage.

While there are no guarantees that these precautions, even if diligently adhered to, will protect you from terrorist violence, they can reduce your vulnerability and, therefore, your chances of becoming a victim.

Sexual Assault Prevention

- Be alert. Don't assume that you are always safe. Think about your safety everywhere. Your best protection is avoiding dangerous situations.
- Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable in any situation, leave.
- Always walk, drive, and park your car in well-lit areas.
- Walk confidently at a steady pace on the side of the street facing traffic.
- Walk close to the curb. Avoid doorways, bushes, and alleys.
- Wear clothes and shoes that allow freedom of movement.
- Walk to your car with keys in your hand.
- If you have car trouble, raise the hood and stay inside your car. If a stranger wants to help, have him or her call for help. Don't leave your car.
- Keep your car doors locked and never pick up hitchhikers.
- Make sure all windows and doors in your home are locked, especially if you are home alone.
- Never give the impression that you are home alone if strangers telephone or come to the door.

- ❑ If a stranger asks to use your phone, have him wait outside while you make the call.
- ❑ If you come home and find a door or window open or signs of forced entry, don't go in. Go to the nearest phone and call Post 1 or the local law enforcement authorities.

Personal Security while on Vacation or Travel Status

* Notify your RSO or PSO of your departure and return dates, but do not otherwise publicize your travel or vacation plans. Leave contact numbers with appropriate mission personnel.

* When traveling, you are more vulnerable to attack. Take special care and remain aware of your surroundings at all times.

* Use special clothing or accessories to hide your passport, money, or credit cards. Keep the majority of your funds in travelers checks and hidden; carry some in your wallet or handbag. The use of a money clip is recommended. If you are robbed, you may lose the money in the clip but will retain important credit cards and documents.

* Consider using a "fanny" or waist pack; these are much safer than carrying a handbag and are more difficult for pickpockets to steal from.



* Be aware of local customs.

* Do some basic research regarding safety and security in the area you are visiting. Talk to your security officer or consular colleagues regarding travel advisories or warnings for the area that you are visiting.

* Obtain and carry with you the telephone number of the local police and nearest U.S. mission.

* You should register with the embassy or consulate if you plan to stay in country for some time, or if the country is in a period of civil unrest (no matter the length of your stay). Registration will make it easier to replace a lost or stolen passport or be evacuated in an emergency.

* Call the Embassy or Consulate in the event of a legal or medical emergency.

Street Safety

* Assailants tend to prey on people who appear preoccupied or confused, so the primary rule of street smarts is to stay alert and aware of your surroundings.

* When walking, keep your back straight, hold your head high, and take a determined stride. Continually glance to the left and right, so you know who and what is nearby.



* If someone stops you to ask for directions or the time, step away at least two-and-a-half arm lengths, stand with feet shoulder-width apart, speak in a neutral but authoritative tone. Never take your eyes off the person's face and hands. Answer quickly and continue walking.

* Walk in the middle of the sidewalk, facing traffic. Some purse-snatchers ride motorcycles or bicycles.

* Pickpockets operate most successfully in crowds. In a crowd, women should tuck their purse in the crook of their arm and keep it close to their body. Keep a hand over the clasp. It is best not to carry a purse at all if you can avoid it. Don't sling your purse across your chest, a purse-snatcher's yank could cause painful neck injury.

* Men should keep their wallets in a front pocket and in crowds should keep a hand on their pocket over their wallet.

* Don't wear expensive jewelry when walking and shopping. You're only making yourself a potential target for street criminals.

* It is always a good idea to keep some money separate from your wallet, so you will not lose everything at one time. Carry only the identification cards, money and credit cards you will actually need. If your Government of India I.D. card is stolen notify the RSO and Personnel office immediately.

* If someone suspicious is following you, walk into the nearest store or restaurant and ask for assistance. Let the suspicious person know that you are aware of him or her.

* If you use a pay phone, select one that is located in a populated, well-lighted area. Face the street or the sidewalk with your back to the phone while your talking. This will allow you to be aware of suspicious persons in the area.

* Never accept food, candy or drinks from strangers on the street. They can be spiked with a drug that puts you to sleep. Knock-out drugs are used to rob victims of their money and valuables. Occasionally the victim is also raped. Knock-out drugs are used in India.

A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety

Introduction

While on-line computer exploration opens a world of possibilities for children, expanding their horizons and exposing them to different cultures and ways of life, they can be exposed to dangers as they hit the road exploring the information highway. There are individuals who attempt to sexually exploit children through the use of on-line services and the Internet. Some of these individuals gradually seduce their targets through the use of attention, affection, kindness, and even gifts. These individuals are often willing to devote considerable amounts of time, money, and energy in this process. They listen to and empathize with the problems of children. They will be aware of the latest music, hobbies, and interests of children. These individuals attempt to gradually lower children's inhibitions by slowly introducing sexual context and content into their conversations.

There are other individuals, however, who immediately engage in sexually explicit conversation with children. Some offenders primarily collect and trade child-pornographic images, while others seek face-to-face meetings with children via on-line contacts. It is important for parents to understand that children can be indirectly victimized through conversation, i.e. "chat," as well as the transfer of sexually explicit information and material. Computer-sex offenders may also be evaluating children they come in contact with on-line for future face-to-face contact and direct victimization. Parents and children should remember that a computer-sex offender can be any age or sex the person does not have to fit the caricature of a dirty, unkempt, older man wearing a raincoat to be someone who could harm a child.

Children, especially adolescents, are sometimes interested in and curious about sexuality and sexually explicit material. They may be moving away from the total control of parents and seeking to establish new relationships outside their family. Because they may be curious, children/adolescents sometimes use their on-line access to actively seek out such materials and individuals. Sex offenders targeting children will use and exploit these characteristics and needs. Some adolescent children may also be attracted to and lured by on-line offenders closer to their age who, although not technically child molesters, may be dangerous. Nevertheless, they have been seduced and manipulated by a clever offender and do not fully understand or recognize the potential danger of these contacts.

This guide was prepared from actual investigations involving child victims, as well as investigations where law enforcement officers posed as children. Further information on protecting your child on-line may be found in the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's Child Safety on the Information Highway and Teen Safety on the Information Highway pamphlets.

What Are Signs That Your Child Might Be At Risk On-line?

Your child spends large amounts of time on-line, especially at night.

Most children that fall victim to computer-sex offenders spend large amounts of time on-line, particularly in chat rooms. They may go on-line after dinner and on the weekends. They may be latchkey kids whose parents have told them to stay at home after school. They go on-line to chat with friends, make new friends, pass time, and sometimes look for sexually explicit information. While much of the knowledge and experience gained may be valuable, parents should consider monitoring the amount of time spent on-line.

Children on-line are at the greatest risk during the evening hours. While offenders are on-line around the clock, most work during the day and spend their evenings on-line trying to locate and lure children or seeking pornography.

You find pornography on your child's computer.

Pornography is often used in the sexual victimization of children. Sex offenders often supply their potential victims with pornography as a means of opening sexual discussions and for seduction. Child pornography may be used to show the child victim that sex between children and adults is "normal." Parents should be conscious of the fact that a child may hide the pornographic files on diskettes from them. This may be especially true if the computer is used by other family members.

Your child receives phone calls from men you don't know or is making calls, sometimes long distance, to numbers you don't recognize.

While talking to a child victim on-line is a thrill for a computer-sex offender, it can be very cumbersome. Most want to talk to the children on the telephone. They often engage in "phone sex" with the children and often seek to set up an actual meeting for real sex.

While a child may be hesitant to give out his/her home phone number, the computer-sex offenders will give out theirs. With Caller ID, they can readily find out the child's phone number. Some computer-sex offenders have even obtained toll-free 800 numbers, so that their potential victims can call them without their parents finding out. Others will tell the child to call collect. Both of these methods result in the computer-sex offender being able to find out the child's phone number.

Your child receives mail, gifts, or packages from someone you don't know.

As part of the seduction process, it is common for offenders to send letters, photographs, and all manner of gifts to their potential victims. Computer-sex offenders have even sent plane tickets in order for the child to travel across the country to meet them.

Your child turns the computer monitor off or quickly changes the screen on the monitor when you come into the room.

A child looking at pornographic images or having sexually explicit conversations does not want you to see it on the screen.

Your child becomes withdrawn from the family.

Computer-sex offenders will work very hard at driving a wedge between a child and their family or at exploiting their relationship. They will accentuate any minor problems at home that the child might have. Children may also become withdrawn after sexual victimization.

Your child is using an on-line account belonging to someone else.

Even if you don't subscribe to an on-line service or Internet service, your child may meet an offender while on-line at a friend's house or the library. Most computers come preloaded with on-line and/or Internet software. Computer-sex offenders will sometimes provide potential victims with a computer account for communications with them.

What Should You Do If You Suspect Your Child Is Communicating With A Sexual Predator On-line?

Consider talking openly with your child about your suspicions. Tell them about the dangers of computer-sex offenders.

Review what is on your child's computer. If you don't know how, ask a friend, coworker, relative, or other knowledgeable person. Pornography or any kind of sexual communication can be a warning sign.

Use the Caller ID service to determine who is calling your child. Most telephone companies that offer Caller ID also offer a service that allows you to block your number from appearing on someone else's Caller ID.

Telephone companies also offer an additional service feature that rejects incoming calls that you block. This rejection feature prevents computer-sex offenders or anyone else from calling your home anonymously.

Devices can be purchased that show telephone numbers that have been dialed from your home phone. Additionally, the last number called from your home phone can be retrieved provided that the telephone is equipped with a redial feature. You will also need a telephone pager to complete this retrieval.

This is done using a numeric-display pager and another phone that is on the same line as the first phone with the redial feature. Using the two phones and the pager, a call is placed from the second phone to the pager. When the paging terminal beeps for you to enter a telephone number, you press the redial button on the first (or suspect) phone. The last number called from that phone will then be displayed on the pager.

Monitor your child's access to all types of live electronic communications (i.e., chat rooms, instant messages, Internet Relay Chat, etc.), and monitor your child's e-mail. Computer-sex offenders almost always meet potential victims via chat rooms. After meeting a child on-line, they will continue to communicate electronically often via e-mail.

Should any of the following situations arise in your household, via the Internet or on-line service, you should immediately contact your local or state law enforcement agency, the FBI, and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children:

1. Your child or anyone in the household has received child pornography;
2. Your child has been sexually solicited by someone who knows that your child is under 18 years of age;
3. Your child has received sexually explicit images from someone that knows your child is under the age of 18.

If one of these scenarios occurs, keep the computer turned off in order to preserve any evidence for future law enforcement use. Unless directed to do so by the law enforcement agency, you should not attempt to copy any of the images and/or text found on the computer.

What Can You Do To Minimize The Chances Of An On-line Exploiter Victimitizing Your Child?

Communicate, and talk to your child about sexual victimization and potential on-line danger.

Spend time with your children on-line. Have them teach you about their favorite on-line destinations.

Keep the computer in a common room in the house, not in your child's bedroom. It is much more difficult for a computer-sex offender to communicate with a child when the computer screen is visible to a parent or another member of the household.

Utilize parental controls provided by your service provider and/or blocking software. While electronic chat can be a great place for children to make new friends and discuss various topics of interest, it is also prowled by computer-sex offenders. Use of chat rooms, in particular, should be heavily monitored. While parents should utilize these mechanisms, they should not totally rely on them.

Always maintain access to your child's on-line account and randomly check his/her e-mail. Be aware that your child could be contacted through the U.S. Mail. Be up front with your child about your access and reasons why.

Teach your child the responsible use of the resources on-line. There is much more to the on-line experience than chat rooms.

Find out what computer safeguards are utilized by your child's school, the public library, and at the homes of your child's friends. These are all places, outside your normal supervision, where your child could encounter an on-line predator.

Understand, even if your child was a willing participant in any form of sexual exploitation, that he/she is not at fault and is the victim. The offender always bears the complete responsibility for his or her actions.

Instruct your children:

to never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they met on-line;

to never upload (post) pictures of themselves onto the Internet or on-line service to people they do not personally know;

to never give out identifying information such as their name, home address, school name, or telephone number;

to never download pictures from an unknown source, as there is a good chance there could be sexually explicit images;

to never respond to messages or bulletin board postings that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, or harassing;

that whatever they are told on-line may or may not be true.

Frequently Asked Questions:

My child has received an e-mail advertising for a pornographic website, what should I do?

Generally, advertising for an adult, pornographic website that is sent to an e-mail address does not violate federal law or the current laws of most states. In some states it may be a violation of law if the sender knows the recipient is under the age of 18. Such advertising can be reported to your service provider and, if known, the service provider of the originator. It can also be reported to your state and federal legislators, so they can be made aware of the extent of the problem.

Is any service safer than the others?

Sex offenders have contacted children via most of the major on-line services and the Internet. The most important factors in keeping your child safe on-line are the utilization of appropriate blocking software and/or parental controls, along with open, honest discussions with your child, monitoring his/her on-line activity, and following the tips in this pamphlet.

Should I just forbid my child from going on-line?

There are dangers in every part of our society. By educating your children to these dangers and taking appropriate steps to protect them, they can benefit from the wealth of information now available on-line.

Helpful Definitions:

Internet - An immense, global network that connects computers via telephone lines and/or fiber networks to storehouses of electronic information. With only a computer, a modem, a telephone line and a service provider, people from all over the world can communicate and share information with little more than a few keystrokes.

Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs) - Electronic networks of computers that are connected by a central computer setup and operated by a system administrator or operator and are distinguishable from the Internet by their "dial-up" accessibility. BBS users link their individual computers to the central BBS computer by a modem which allows them to post messages, read messages left by others, trade information, or hold direct conversations. Access to a BBS can, and often is, privileged and limited to those users who have access privileges granted by the systems operator.

Commercial On-line Service (COS) - Examples of COSs are America Online, Prodigy, CompuServe and Microsoft Network, which provide access to their service for a fee. COSs generally offer limited access to the Internet as part of their total service package.

Internet Service Provider (ISP) - Examples of ISPs are Erols, Concentric and Netcom. These services offer direct, full access to the Internet at a flat, monthly rate and often provide electronic-mail service for their customers. ISPs often provide space on their servers for their customers to maintain World Wide Web (WWW) sites. Not all ISPs are commercial enterprises. Educational, governmental and nonprofit organizations also provide Internet access to their members.

Public Chat Rooms - Created, maintained, listed and monitored by the COS and other public domain systems such as Internet Relay Chat. A number of customers can be in the public chat rooms at any given time, which are monitored for illegal activity and even appropriate language by systems operators (SYSOP). Some public chat rooms are monitored more frequently than others, depending on the COS and the type of chat room. Violators can be reported to the administrators of the system (at America On-line they are referred to as terms of service [TOS]) which can revoke user privileges. The public chat rooms usually cover a broad range of topics such as entertainment, sports, game rooms, children only, etc.

Electronic Mail (E-Mail) - A function of BBSs, COSs and ISPs which provides for the transmission of messages and files between computers over a communications network similar to mailing a letter via the postal service. E-mail is stored on a server, where it will remain until the addressee retrieves it. Anonymity can be maintained by the sender by predetermining what the receiver will see as the "from" address. Another way to conceal one's identity is to use an "anonymous remailer," which is a service that allows the user to send an e-mail message repackaged under the remailer's own header, stripping off the originator's name completely.

Chat - Real-time text conversation between users in a chat room with no expectation of privacy. All chat conversation is accessible by all individuals in the chat room while the conversation is taking place.

Instant Messages - Private, real-time text conversation between two users in a chat room.

Internet Relay Chat (IRC) - Real-time text conversation similar to public and/or private chat rooms on COS.

Usenet (Newsgroups) - Like a giant, cork bulletin board where users post messages and information. Each posting is like an open letter and is capable of having attachments, such as graphic image files (GIFs). Anyone accessing the newsgroup can read the postings, take copies of posted items, or post responses. Each newsgroup can hold thousands of postings. Currently, there are over 29,000 public newsgroups and that number is growing daily. Newsgroups are both public and/or private. There is no listing of private newsgroups. A user of private newsgroups has to be invited into the newsgroup and be provided with the newsgroup's address.